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ABSTRACT

As a follow-up to a recommendation for lowering the age for membership in 4-H to six years, a study of the characteristics of the six- to eight-year old age group was undertaken. The nine developmental tasks identified by Havighurst as being the main tasks facing this group were used as an outline for a discussion of tasks and characteristics leading to better understanding of children in this age group. The child was also studied in terms of year by year developmental characteristics. Some States have already initiated programs for the six- to eight-year old group, and there is support for such programs at the national 4-H level. The study identified 10 characteristics of the children which must be considered in program planning. They pertain to learning processes, peer relationships, and needs. Eleven subject and activity areas of interest were identified, and topical interests tend to suggest that a creative educational program could be developed for the particular age group. Further study is recommended. (AG)

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Opportunities and Implications for the Inclusion of Six to Eight—Year—Old Boys and Girls in the 4—H Program

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I -- SITUATION

"Big enough to cover the entire world and flexible enough to fit the needs of every boy and girl--that is the 4-H Club"(1)

Has 4-H done this, is it conducting such a program today, and more importantly, will 4-H be able to flex and adapt to tomorrows needs? Pitchell (2) points out that 4-H reaches less than ten percent of the youth between 10 and 19 years of age and less than one percent of the youth in metropolitan areas.

Are we reaching and programming for the right group of youth? Benjamin Bloom (3) states that 50 percent of the child's mental development has been reached by the age of four and 30 percent more by the age of eight. 4-H programs in most states do not include youth until they are nine or ten years of age.

Few states have geared their existing 4-H programs to challenge the opportunities that may exist among these millions of eager boys and girls that thrive on learning and doing new things. Scouting programs have included these younger youth in their organizations.

There appears to be a great deal of interest and concern in this subject within the 4-H ranks. The ECOP 4-H Subcommittee (4) at a meeting held December 14 - 16, 1971 in Biloxi, Mississippi, went on record as recommending the lowering of the 4-H age to six years and to recommend this change to ECOP for approval.

II -- PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS

1. What developmental tasks must boys and girls 6 to 8 years of age accomplish during this age period? What are they interested in?

2. Can Extension offer programs that will add to the development of these boys and girls?

3. What success has other states had with programs aimed at this age?

4. Are we interested in working with this age child?

5. What can we offer these boys and girls to get them enthusized and involved?

6. Does Extension have the resources to program successfully for this group?

7. Is this the age group that Extension should program for in order to expand membership and to have the most impact on those served?

III -- TASKS

1. To determine what the developmental tasks of the 6 to 8 year old child are.

2. To relate these tasks to concrete living experiences.

3. To determine if Extension through 4-H should and could program to provide some desirable learning experiences for these boys and girls.

4. To determine what other states have attempted or are attempting to program for this group and what successes or failures they have experienced.

5. To explore programming ideas.

IV -- FINDINGS

A - Study of the 6 to 8 year olds

The primary focus of my research was an attempt to understand boys and girls that are in the "forgotten years of child-

hood" as Lambert (5) describes them. She feels that little has been written about what makes the six-to-twelve tick.

Erikson (6) describes this age as the industry vs. inferiority stage in his eight ages of man.

Most authorities seem to agree that this age group has been slighted in attention perhaps because growth has slowed down and as Gesell and Ilg (7) states, "Being intermediate years they lack the dramatic vividness of infancy on the one hand and of adolescence on the other."

Duvall (8) says, "This is the period when the child wants to learn how to do and to make things with others. In learning to accept instruction and to win recognition by producing things he opens the way for the capacity of work enjoyment."

Middle childhood is characterized by three great outward pushes. There is the thrust of the child out of the home and into the peer group, the physical thrust into the world of games and work requiring neuromuscular skills, and the mental thrust into the world of adult concepts, logic, symbolism, and communication. (9)

The developmental tasks of middle childhood grow out of these three thrusts of growth in the child. We shall use the nine developmental tasks identified by Havighurst (9) as being the main tasks that this age group is faced with to serve as an outline for a discussion of tasks and characteristics which will help us understand boys and girls at this particular age.

(1) Learning physical skills necessary for ordinary games. The large muscles are developing so throwing, kicking, catching,

swimming, and handling of simple tools are important activities in their development. He points out that boys of all classes are expected to learn these skills and to a higher degree than girls.

The child is full of curiosity which leads him to cut out, paint on, paste up, and to take things apart. (10)

"Children who cannot or do not play find it more difficult to make adjustment to their friends, to their families, to school, and to the world," according to Lambert (5)

(2) Building wholesome attitudes toward oneself as a growing organism. Developing habits of care of the body; of cleanliness and safety, the ability to enjoy using the body, and a wholesome attitude toward sex are most important during this period. Health habits should be taught routinely, using the prestige of glamorous figure in athletics and movies to impress them favorably. He feels that the facts about animal and human reproduction should be taught before puberty.

(3) Learning to get along with age mates. This task involves learning to make friends and to adjust to the give-and-take of social life among peers. In America a good physique and physical skills are important as a basis for good relations with peers. This period is characterized by an increasing need for approval from the peer group and a decreasing need for approval from the family.

(4) Learning an appropriate masculine or feminine role. To learn to be a boy or girl and to act the role is the task. However, biologically the differences between boys and girls

do not require a difference in sex role at this age. Girls are nearly as strong as boys and as well built for physical activities.

Our American culture does expect differences in the behavior of boys and girls and these are taught from birth. There are differences in the acceptable sex role in different social classes. The lower class boy is taught to be a good fighter while the middle class boy is expected to fight in self defense only.

(5) Developing fundamental skills in reading, writing, and calculating. Biologically the childs' nervous system becomes mature enough and complex enough to permit the learning of reading, writing, and arithmetic during this period. The eyes become ready for reading about the sixth year but most children are naturally farsighted in early childhood and their eyes may not become normalized and thus best suited for reading until eight years of age. Therefore, children at six should not be pressured to learn to read and write, they may not be ready.

(6) Developing concepts necessary for everyday living. Concepts are tools to think with and a child may have developed several hundred by the time he starts to school. Now he must acquire enough, perhaps several thousand, concepts to effectively think about occupational, civic, and social matters. A good share of these concepts should grow out of concrete experiences. A child can develop a fairly accurate concept of a llama by seeing pictures of it and hearing it described but to actually see a llama will allow him to form an accurate concept.

(7) Developing conscience, morality, and a scale of values. The task for the child is to develop an inner moral control, respect for moral rules, and the beginning of a rational scale of values. The child has no conscience and no scale of values at birth. His conscience is developed by the punishing acts of the parents combined with their love and reward for the child and through his love and dependence on them. Morality or the rules of behavior are imposed on the child by the parents. The child must learn that rules are necessary for the conduct of any social activity and thus they learn the morality of cooperation. Values are being developed which will allow the child to make stable choices and to hold himself to these choices.

(8) Achieving personal independence. Independence from adults grows slowly and is not complete by the end of middle childhood. It comes first in his choice of things to do around the home, going away to school, and in choosing friends. Our society seems to allow boys more freedom to develop this independence than the girls.

(9) Developing attitudes toward social groups. Attitudes are developed from an imitation of people with prestige, collection of pleasant and unpleasant experiences, and by a single deeply emotional experience. Basic attitudes toward religious, social, political, and economic groups are learned during these years. They can be changed by later experiences but not easily.

Now we shall look at the child from a different perspective, year by year developmental characteristics. Gesell and Ilg (7) state "the 6-year old is in a bipolar phase, trying at one and

the same time to find himself and to find out his new environment. Choice and reconciliation between these two poles create tensions and hesitations." He characterizes the six year old as being brash, combative, hesitant, overdemanding, explosive, while at other times he can be delightful and companionable.

The 6 year old is losing his milk teeth, body chemistry is undergoing changes, not as disease resistant as at five, and trying to make a distinction between good and bad. Reactions are expressed with his whole body and dramatic activities are a method of growing and learning. He is constantly active, clumsy, likes to explore everything, loves to do things, mostly concerned with pleasing himself, trying to understand life, father is very important in their life, better at winning than losing, and likes to swap things.

The seven year old has himself better in hand as he has a greater capacity to absorb and then organize his new cultural experiences. This is the quieting down period, he becomes a better listener, may seem more introverted, becoming more aware of others and their feelings, is best suited for short tasks, still not a good loser, can continue a game or activity on and on, and is becoming critical of himself. He likes praise and is very sensitive of disapproval.

The 7 year old has become more cautious, wants to acquire abilities to do things, is more serious, has difficulty in starting things but is then quite persistent, does not want to experience new situations by himself, boy-girl pairs are common but some discrimination against the opposite sex is

starting, still awkward, inventive nature, likes to collect large quantities of anything, can respond quite well to directions, and likes to swap things.

By the age of eight, the budget of income and outgo shows new balances. The child has built up a firmer body of experience and is able to give as well as to take. He shows more initiative in going out to meet the environment.

The 8 year old has become more of a person by adult standards. He is expansive, speedy, evaluative, likes rough and tumble play, expects and acts for praise, two sexes are drawing apart, demands maternal attention, group activity is effective, still a strong urge to make collections and a strong interest in money. Boys and girls share many interests, attitudes about racial prejudice form, the origin and growth of plants from seed and an interest in the life and life processes of animals is deepening.

He still likes to dramatize, now interested in a finished product, ready to tackle anything, now wants to live up to a standary other people have set for him, likes a reward system, separates into separate sex groups, plays better with older children, wants to play and work in groups, and wants to be good.

Most of the above comments were derived from Gesell and Ilg, however, all of the other authors and publications researched seemed to agree on nearly all the growing up characteristics and tasks of the 6 to 8 year olds.

8 - What is presently being done

There appears to be a great deal of interest in this topic

from the national level on down through the states and into local counties.

Definite steps are being initiated such as the action and recommendation made by the ECOP 4-H Subcommittee (4) to lower the 4-H age to 6 and that a National committee be appointed to study and make recommendations concerning programs, literature, and leader training appropriate for the 6, 7, and 8 year olds.

Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Kansas, and some other states have or are experimenting with programs aimed at this age group.

In North Carolina a few counties such as Wayne and Haywood have limited programs in operation that is including and involving youth of this lower age group.

Kansas (11) is presently outlining plans for reorganization of their entire 4-H program. They have decided to focus on 4 age groups with the youngest being the 7 and 8 year olds.

Their outline recommends five to ten members in a co-educational group and all members to have been friends before joining, if possible. Meetings are to be held once a week or oftener on afternoons after school or Saturdays and to be one hour or less in length. Recreation is highly encouraged at each meeting and should consist primarily of simple games. Creative dramatics is also recommended.

Short term projects in which something can be accomplished or completed at each meeting is recommended. Creative rather than skill projects, collecting, and pet projects are suggested

as being especially suited. They feel that members should be recognized several times a year.

Day camps and trips to points of interest are suggested as activities for this age group. The Kansas plan recommends one or two leaders for each group and that one or both could be teens. The leadership could be somewhat more directive than at older age clubs. The plan further points out that pins, badges, uniforms, ribbons, etc. should be provided at every opportunity.

Frederick County, Maryland (12) has Poppie clubs for the 6, 7, and 8 year olds. The first Poppie club was started in 1965. The Poppies meet twice a month for an hour. Half of their program consists of crafts, skills, or movies, and the other half is recreation, games, singing, and refreshment. They also take field trips and work on community service projects.

Both men and women are serving as leaders in Frederick County and nearly every club has a junior leader working with it. They report that the Poppie program has been especially effective in urban areas and has helped the 4-H image by expanding its scope and promotion.

V -- IMPLICATIONS

The research of information on the 6 to 8 year olds indicates many characteristics which are important if we are going to consider including them in our 4-H program. Some of the most important are:

- they are eager to learn by doing, to explore, to collect
- desire to be with their peers

- important that they have the opportunity to play together
- a need to develop skills and to achieve
- a need to share responsibilities at home
- do not want the pressure of competition with others, will be satisfied with the reward and joy of knowing and doing
- the need to associate with adults outside of the family
- the need to establish a strong relationship with father
- the need for the opportunity to participate in creative and life-like dramatics
- the need to learn the value of money

Specific subjects and activities that the various authors indicated that were of interest to these boys and girls were:

- carpentry
- bow and arrow
- flowers
- cooking
- collecting stamps, etc.
- drawing, painting, coloring
- pets
- birds
- bicycles
- puppy raising
- role playing, dramatics

A survey of the members of the course for which this paper was prepared indicated that as agents, the following topics, from a selected group of thirty, would be of most interest to these young boys and girls:

- pets
- bicycle
- health-good teeth
- foods-making cookies
- growing flowers from seeds
- foods-meals and manners
- health-how do you breathe
- home management-dusting furniture
- insect collecting
- electricity-get acquainted with static electricity

The foregoing information would tend to suggest that a creative educational program could be developed for this new

potential 4-H audience by careful study and understanding of the developmental tasks of the age group, adaption of some of our existing materials to the level and interests of the group, development of some new materials, and a somewhat different leadership and organizational approach.

VI -- RECOMMENDATIONS AND PLAN OF ACTION

The author recommends that further study be conducted and that serious consideration be taken to iniatiate a program in North Carolina to reach this new audience. It is further recommended that the Extension agents in the state be informed of the ECOP Subcommittee recommendation and that a 4-H specialist be charged with the responsibility of coordinating information, developing materials, assisting county 4-H agents, etc. in piloting this new effort.

This author recommends that seven and eight year olds be the primary target of the new program with some reservations concerning the six year olds. The six year in starting his first year of formal school faces a tremendous change in his young like, is thus filled with many tensions and indecisions, and perhaps should not be thrust into another new situation such as a club. The Kansas plan as previously outlined is recommended as a sound model,which seems to fit the tasks and needs of this age group, from which to study and adapt for North Carolina. One exception is that single sex groups might be more desirable in some situations.

The author plans to study the subject further and to secure more information and materials from other states that are pro-

gramming for the age group concerned. Every effort will be made this fall to initiate a program in Alamance County, especially in the urban areas. A concerted effort will be made to recruit and train older 4-H members, high school, and college students to provide leadership for new clubs. An effort will be made to encourage and assist existing clubs to form one or more satellite clubs composed of younger boys and girls in their neighborhood. Parents, especially fathers, will be recruited vigorously for leadership of these new clubs.

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